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HEADLINE: FRONT PAGE: BIN LADEN FUNDS ABU SAYYAF THROUGH MUSLIM RELIEF GROUP

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BODY:

A MUSLIM relief organization is a conduit for funds to the Abu Sayyaf from Saudi billionaire, Osama Bin Laden, the US Public Enemy No. 1, and his brother-in-law, Mohammad Jamal Khalifa.

This was confirmed to the INQUIRER in Davao City by a former member of the original Abu Sayyaf group, who uses the nom de guerre Abu Anzar.

Anzar's disclosure is supported by police and military intelligence reports that state Bin Laden and Khalifa in 1992 set up the International Islamic Relief Organization Inc. (IIRO) with offices in Makati and in several cities in Mindanao as a front organization for funding terrorist activities.

The IIRO, according to the intelligence report, was working under the Muslim World League, an organization wholly financed by the Saudi Arabia government.

"The IIRO which claims to be a relief institution is being utilized by foreign extremists as a pipeline through which funding for the local extremists is being coursed," the intelligence report noted.

Bin Laden has used his personal fortune to finance terrorist activities all over the world. US authorities had fingered Bin Laden as the mastermind of the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 which killed 257 persons and wounded more than 5,000.

Though Khalifa has denied involvement in Bin Laden's activities, he had admitted "very close ties in the past." The second of Khalifa's four wives is the sister of Bin Laden.

Through Khalifa, who lived in the country for nine years, a Stratfor intelligence report said that "Bin Laden's network is already deeply entrenched in the Philippines."

Education

It was the MWL-IIRO that established the Al-Makdhum University in Zamboanga City which started accepting Islamic students in 1992, the intelligence report said.

According to the report, the IIRO also offers scholarship to qualified students who have the potential to be Islamic scholars. They then are tasked to indoctrinate other Muslims on terrorist tactics.

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In an interview with the INQUIRER, Anzar said the IIRO was used by Bin Laden and Khalifa to distribute funds for the purchase of arms and other logistical requirements of the Abu Sayyaf in the guise of relief and livelihood projects for Muslim communities in Mindanao.

"Only 10 to 30 percent of the foreign funding goes to the legitimate relief and livelihood projects and the rest go to terrorist operations," Anzar added.

"The IIRO was behind the construction of mosques, school buildings and other livelihood projects in areas penetrated, highly influenced and controlled by the Abu Sayyaf," Anzar said.

The IIRO provides a steady supply of clothing, canned goods, rice and other necessities to impoverished Muslim communities.

"Bin Laden and Khalifa saw that the Muslim people needed help but he wanted immediate results, which he could not expect from the MILF. So he founded and funded the Abu Sayyaf, the Muslims' terrorist arm," he explained

Al Haj Murad, MILF vice chair for military affairs, had confirmed to the INQUIRER two years ago that Bin Laden and Khalifa provided "help and assistance" to MILF cadres who volunteered in the 1980s to help the Taliban struggle against the Soviet-backed Afghanistan government.

Original Abu

The original Abu Sayyaf was headed by Aburajak Abubakr Janjalani and another faction was led by Galib Andang, aka Commander Robot, who broke away from the Moro National Liberation Front after the formation of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development under former Moro National Liberation Front chief Nur Misuari.

Anzar said Bin Laden and Khalifa financed the urban warfare and terrorism training in Libya of their recruits to the Abu Sayyaf, including Janjalani and Edwin Angeles, the founding Abu Sayyaf vice commander and intelligence chief.

It was Angeles who recruited Anzar to the Abu Sayyaf. After undergoing advanced Islamic studies, Anzar became the group's liaison officer and Angeles' right-hand man.

When Angeles returned from Libya, he allegedly carried out the bombing of the Jolo Cathedral in Sulu in 1991.

Bin Laden and Khalifa also funded the three-month commando training course of the recruited Abu Sayyaf members in March 1993 in Patikul, Sulu, Anzar recounted. Khalifa served as one of the advisers of the Abu Sayyaf, the intelligence report noted, which was also confirmed by Anzar.

Records show the IIRO, a non-stock, non-profit organization, was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission on Sept. 20, 1991 with Khalifa as president and chair of the board of trustees.

Based on the SEC documents obtained by the INQUIRER, the IIRO's primary objectives are:

- * To provide humanitarian services which will develop and elevate the educational, social and health aspects among the communities in the Philippines.

- * To assist victims of natural and man-made calamities in the Philippines by giving financial assistance and relief goods, clothing, etc.

- * To own, acquire, purchase, lease, sell, convey, transfer and establish orphanage centers, mosques, machinery equipment.

- * To accept donations and contributions from national and foreign sources.

- * Other incidental purposes not mentioned above.

The IIRO is expected to exist for 50 years from and after the date of incorporation in 1991.

Anzar said it was the objective "other incidental purposes not mentioned above" that became the priority of Bin Laden and Khalifa's group.

Asked why Bin Laden and Khalifa were supporting the Moro terrorists, Anzar said: "Any Muslim community that the Philippine government wanted to control got help."

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"Bin Laden and Khalifa knew the Muslim people are no match for the resources and logistics of the Philippine government. So they decided to pour in funds to help us through the IIRO. It's a legal bank-to-bank transaction and a legitimate relief organization but the bulk of the funds go to terrorist operations," Anzar said.

"Based on our doctrine that Bin Laden and Khalifa share, if you are a Muslim, you are obliged to help reach your goal-to establish an Islamic state-even by force," he stressed.

He explained that if the Muslim could not personally engage in combat, he or she could help through spiritual or material aspects.

"Spiritual help means we pray for the success of the operations and material is logistics," he said.

"In the case of Bin Laden and Khalifa, they are not combatants, so they give material support. Money. Lots of money," Anzar explained.

The money was used, he said, primarily to create chaos and embarrass the Manila government.

"See, if there are bombings, kidnappings and killings, there will be no peace and development. Local and foreign investors would not come to Mindanao. That's what we want. They should not invade our place. Mindanao is ours. How come other non-Muslim people reign here? We are the ones who are hungry; we are on the run; we have no livelihood," Anzar said.

"Bin Laden, Khalifa and other foreign Muslim terrorists share that so they help us turn away the invaders, including the government. We don't need the Philippine government here. We want our own Muslim government."

Bin Laden and Khalifa generously provided the funds for the terrorist acts of the Abu Sayyaf and they had no complaints, he said.

"Whether the money was used for bombings, kidnappings, Bin Laden and Khalifa did not complain, for as long as the objective-to fight and prevail upon the government-was reached," he said.

Support for Robot

He said the original Abu Sayyaf members supported Commander Robot's kidnapping of 31 mostly foreign nationals because it sent a strong message to the Philippine government and the foreign governments "not to mess with Muslim people in Mindanao."

From the multimillion-peso ransom raised by the Robot gang, "Bin Laden and Khalifa do not get a single centavo. They even give more," Anzar said.

This act of generosity, Anzar said, has lured more Muslims to join the Abu Sayyaf.

"There's plenty of money. For instance, we have a weeklong operation, we leave money to our families more than enough to spend for the month," he said. "For example, our families spend about P1,000 a week, we would be given five times that amount."

Anzar said this allowed the Abu Sayyaf to sustain their operations. The more they engaged in terrorism, the more financial support poured in from Bin Laden and Khalifa.

Anzar said even before Angeles was nabbed by the government (although the Abu Sayyaf believed he surrendered and turned against his comrades), Bin Laden and Khalifa started organizing another group-that of Commander Robot.

"So there would be no setback in terrorist operations," he said.

The financial support from Bin Laden continued even after Khalifa was arrested in Sta. Rita, California, on Dec. 26, 1994 and was detained by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation for using fake travel papers, he said.

He said Angeles was killed in January 1999, a month after Janjalani was killed by government troops on Dec. 18, 1998.

"Janjalani's relatives believed it was Angeles who had Janjalani killed so he was also killed by the relatives," he said.

"The (original) group broke up. We had contacts with Commander Robot. We are still armed up to now. But we'd rather do our own thing. Preferably lie low, now that the government is going after the original members," he said.

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Anzar said he surfaced to tell his story to the INQUIRER that the Abu Sayyaf are proud to be called terrorists. (Tomorrow, Khalifa's own terrorist network. And who's the Cabinet official listed as a board member of the IIRO foundation?)

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